




CITY OF HAYWARD
AGENDA REPORT

AGENDA DATE 01/21/03
AGENDA ITEM _____
WORK SESSION ITEM WS2

TO: Mayor and City Council
FROM: City Manager
SUBJECT: Update Concerning Funding for 880/92 Interchange Project

The electronic and print media (see attached Daily Review article) have reported that the cost of constructing the new Benicia Bridge has increased dramatically. According to these reports, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission has placed the cost of the Bridge at \$905 million, an increase of some \$250 million. Because of this increase, the Commission is exploring various options to fund the added costs. Apparently, one option is to reduce the allocation for the 880/92 Interchange Project, and redirect those dollars to the Benicia Bridge project. Obviously, such a decision would have a significant impact on Hayward.

City staff will be meeting with MTC staff on Friday, January 17, to better understand the options under consideration and how they impact the interchange project. This item appears on the worksession agenda to enable staff to provide the Council with an oral report on what we learn from MTC staff. As it may be necessary for Hayward to express a specific position at the MTC meeting, guidance from the Council may be required, since the Commission is scheduled to discuss this matter at its January 22 meeting.


Jesús Armas, City Manager

Attachment

Daily Review

Fish hinder interchange, bridge plans

Protecting salmon,
By Sean Holstege
STAFF WRITER

Thursday, January 09, 2003 - The cost of preventing exploding salmon could spell the demise of the new Benicia Bridge or of a major freeway interchange in Hayward.

The situation also raises new questions about whether California has enough money to complete a new span on the Bay Bridge.

Construction of a second Benicia Bridge on Interstate 680 has shot up by \$250 million in nine months because work was halted twice. The 200-decibel noise of pile-driving in the Carquinez Strait kills salmon and other fish. Pile driving was halted on Nov. 1.

The Metropolitan Transportation Commission, overseeing the project, placed the cost at \$905 million on Wednesday, up from the \$653 million bid of late 2001.

Planners left the 19-member panel to decide at its next meeting on Jan. 22 to scrap the new bridge or find the money to finish it by gutting a proposed critical interchange at I-880 and Highway 92, which routinely clogs up with San Mateo Bridge traffic.

"We're clearly in the place of no good options," MTC spokes-man Randy Rentschler said.

The regional agency has a plan to find an extra \$250 million, but even under MTC's best-case scenario, the Benicia Bridge could be another 18 months late, some endangered fish will be killed, state and federal environmental regulators must bless the plan quickly, and money will be taken from the I-880-92 interchange and Bay Area bridge repairs.

Until Wednesday, the Benicia Bridge was supposed to open in December 2004.

MTC's dilemma stems from a Caltrans discovery in April, when engineers learned that the underwater shock wave of pile driving was killing salmon and smelt by bursting their internal organs.

They devised a plan, and won approval from environmental regulators. During key migration times, work would only be done during slack tides, when the current from the Delta and the tides from the Pacific Ocean offset each other. At all times, the piles would be sheathed by an outer steel casing and air bubbles would be injected into the gap.

The system was called an air curtain and it worked all summer, as the bubbles dampened some of the underwater sound of the clanging pile driving.

But now, the delays have added so much cost that MTC says it will run out of money to complete the bridge if Caltrans doesn't work at times that will kill some endangered fish, though not as many as before the introduction of the bubble curtains. Only two of nine deep-water piles have been driven.

MTC says it needs an OK of its plan from environmental agencies "soon," and hopes for one in two weeks.

"We want to protect fish, but we also want to get finished with the bridge foundations this calendar year," MTC bridge project manager Rod McMillan said.

Without a go-ahead, Mc-Millan said, it could mean more delays and more costs. In the meantime, officials connected with the Benicia Bridge project are set to meet next week in the offices of Rep. George Miller, D-Martinez.

The firms that designed and are building the Benicia Bridge are also involved in a \$1 billion new eastern span of the Bay Bridge, where work is just beginning to take shape on a 1.2-mile skyway.

After learning of fish kills last April, Caltrans opted to use bubble curtains to protect fish in the shallow waters east of Yerba Buena Island as well.

News of the Benicia Bridge overruns comes as Caltrans prepares to drive piles on the new Bay Bridge this month.

And the most complicated parts of the Bay Bridge work have yet to be bid on. These include a unique single-towered suspension span, tearing down the existing eastern span and connecting the new bridge to the island tunnel without disrupting traffic. Currently, the grand total for a new Bay Bridge stands at \$2.6 billion, but some estimates have the figure at \$3.3 billion.

"It looks like a bad omen, but we're not there just yet," said one expert who monitors Caltrans projects.

Caltrans remained steadfast in its claim that the Bay Bridge, plus seismic work on the San Rafael, Carquinez and existing Benicia bridges will not require any more money from state coffers or Bay Area motorists.

In 2001, the Legislature voted to make a \$2 toll on Bay Area bridges permanent and took money from highway projects around the state to cover a doubling of the cost for seismic projects, in what was a bitter partisan fight between Bay Area and Southern California lawmakers.

MTC estimates that a fund created by state lawmakers to cover contingencies such as the fish problem has \$243 million left.

Caltrans spokesman Dennis Trujillo said the agency has been "aggressive" in keeping costs down and has "realized some savings," since the Bay Bridge skyway project was awarded. He added that the fish problem should not add costs or delays to the Bay Bridge.

"We worked closely and aggressively with federal and state resource agencies and got their approval for our mitigation measures," he said.

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